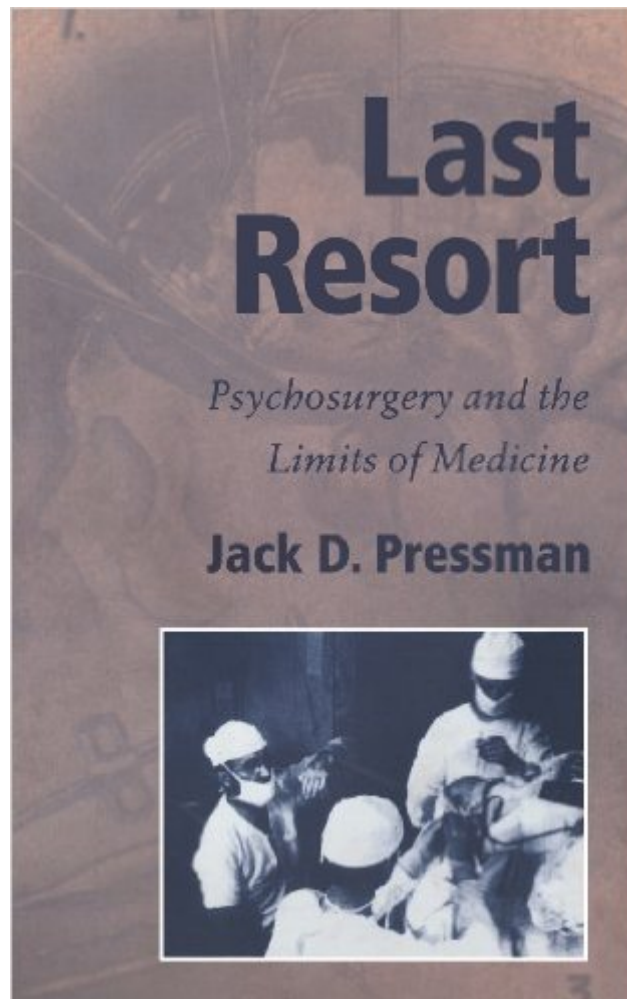


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# Last Resort: Psychosurgery And The Limits Of Medicine (Cambridge Studies In The History Of Medicine)



## Synopsis

During the 1940s and 1950s, tens of thousands of Americans underwent some form of psychosurgery; that is, their brains were operated upon for the putative purpose of treating mental illness. From today's perspective, such medical practices appear foolhardy at best, perhaps even barbaric; most commentators thus have seen in the story of lobotomy an important warning about the kinds of hazards that society will face whenever incompetent or malicious physicians are allowed to overstep the boundaries of valid medical science. *Last Resort* challenges the previously accepted psychosurgery story and raises new questions about what we should consider its important lessons.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is not a lightly undertaken book to read. It is an exemplary work on the social, political and medical trends which led to neuro/psychiatric surgery being tried, accepted, and then discarded after research found it to be severely lacking in moral and therapeutic worth. Pressman did an outstanding job of research into the advancement of lobotomies in psychiatry as a means to control patients, who up til that time, had no resort or cure with which to treat these patients. The drugs which are used today to control schizophrenics and manic-depressives were not available in the early twentieth century, yet the advancement of regular medical science in both areas of surgery and pharmaceuticals raised the expectations of U.S. society towards those of psychiatric persuasion to find like means of treating the immense numbers of patients in state hospitals with

mental illness. Like many who went through medical school and biology/neuroscience, I was appalled to read about the use of lobotomies. This book endeavors with great fairness and accuracy to put the pressures of both society and science on psychiatrists into the picture, in order to create understanding as to why this means of treatment was pushed so hard, and why so many underwent a questionable method before it could be proven totally effective. Not only did Pressman write well and intensely about this, but his ability to put the topic into historical perspective and his impartiality towards both the method and the doctors involved made me rethink my prior prejudices towards these men. This is a wonderful book, and not only should it be in medical libraries, but it should be part of the required readings for all medical students and ethicists. It is our great loss that Pressman died after this book was finished and too young, because his ability to write medical history and ethics could have been much used at this point. Karen Sadler, Science Education, University of Pittsburgh

I went to school with Jack Pressman and we shared the same history of science class that inspired Jack to follow this path. I am excited to read it.

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